



REPORT OF:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE
TO:	COUNCIL
ON:	6th DECEMBER 2018

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS – OCTOBER 2018

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

For the Council to consider and approve the final recommendations following the review and public consultation.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Council is asked:

- 1 To note the review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations commenced on 1 October 2018.
- 2 To approve the final recommendations of the review and changes to polling districts, polling places and polling stations for parliamentary and local government elections.
- 3 Subject to 2 above, to note the publication date (1 February 2019) of the revised electoral register and implementation of the review from 2 May 2019 (or earlier in the event of a General Election or a referendum).
- 4 To delegate to the Chief Executive, as the (Acting) Returning Officer to make any appropriate changes to the polling districts, polling places and polling stations following approval of the final recommendations whenever such needs arise, until the next formal review.
- 5 Subject to 1-4 above, authorise the Director of HR, Legal & Governance to make any necessary changes to the Council's Constitution.

3. BACKGROUND

The Council went through a boundary review by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, which reviewed the ward boundaries within Blackburn with Darwen. The review by the LGBCE recommended a reduction of councillors from 64 to 51 and changed the number of electoral wards from 23 to 17. These recommendations were approved and adopted through the Blackburn with Darwen (Electoral Changes) Order 2017.

The council must also regularly review the division of its area into polling districts and the places where electors are asked to vote. Full reviews must be started and completed within the period of 16 months that starts on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013.

In view of the boundary review undertaken by LGBCE and the regular review under legislation, the Council held a review of our polling districts, polling places and polling stations to ensure they are aligned where possible and fit for purpose.

The designation of the Council's polling places and districts is the responsibility of the Council and the relevant functions, including the Council's duties under the Representation of the People Act 1983 to divide constituencies into polling districts and the power to divide wards into polling districts at local government elections. The review of parliamentary polling districts and places has been combined with that of local polling districts. This will ensure that polling districts for local elections are the same as for parliamentary elections. Although polling districts for local government elections are not automatically part of the statutory review. However, the Electoral Commission advises that the polling districts for UK parliamentary and local government elections should always be the same, and it therefore follows that any review of parliamentary polling arrangements should be conducted simultaneously with one of local government arrangements. Therefore the review covered the polling arrangements for parliamentary and local government polling arrangements. The (Acting) Returning Officer for the Rossendale & Darwen constituency was formally notified of the Council's review and was invited for any representations during the consultation period.

The allocation of polling stations within polling places is not a Council function and is the responsibility of the Returning Officer. However, in practice the consideration of the location of likely polling stations will have an important impact on the choice of polling places and the boundaries of polling districts, particularly in some areas of the borough where suitable premises have been hard to locate. The Chief Executive (as the Returning Officer) therefore, arranged a Member Feedback Session on 17 September and invited feedback of his initial proposals and suggestions for any suitable alternative polling stations where appropriate. Comments and suggestions received informed and assisted in completing the Returning Officer's representations which were then published for public consultation.

4. THE REVIEW

The formal procedure to be followed by local authorities in undertaking the review is described in Schedule A1 of the RPA 1983. The Council therefore published a notice of holding a review on 1 October 2018 and consulted parliamentary Returning Officer for the Rossendale & Darwen constituency. The Returning Officer's proposals and representations were published on the Council website for public consultation, which took place between 1 October 2018 and 9 November 2018. During the consultation period representations and comments were invited from any interested parties, including Members, the two Members of Parliament, the Returning Officer for the Rossendale & Darwen constituency, local disability groups and other interested parties. A hard copy of the Returning Officer's proposals and representations was also available for inspection at the Town Hall by contacting the Elections Office.

The review and the recommendations involved visiting and accessing a number of existing and proposed polling places/stations in Blackburn and Darwen. In designating polling places/stations the Council ensured that a set criteria was met relating to the location, facilities, accessibility to and within the polling place/station (including disabled access), health and safety and space. The review also included an evaluation of temporary polling stations (mobiles) to determine whether their continued use and location provided the best option, and taking into account the feedback the council had received from residents and electors over the years. In drawing up recommendations consideration was also needed to be given to the number of polling stations allocated for a given electorate. The physical geography of a ward including, railway lines, dual carriageways, hills, the shape of the ward itself was also taken into account. Other

factors taken into consideration included the situation of polling places/stations in relation to wider amenities and the main transport routes within a ward. In order to predict the likely number of electors at a polling station in the future, turnout figures from the May 2018 'all out' elections were used. Other information referred to during the review included availability and accessibility of polling places and previous representations made by candidates, agents and polling station staff.

All comments and representations received during the consultation period were considered before the Returning Officer's final recommendations were prepared. The Returning Officer's final recommendations were due to be published on the website by 30 November and information/ward maps on display in the Council Chamber from week commencing 3 December. When the final recommendations were published on the council website, a web link was sent to all Members, the offices of the 2 MPs, the (Acting) Returning Officer for the Rossendale & Darwen constituency and local disability groups.

The Council's approval of the final recommendations will complete the review the new polling arrangements will be implemented at the next scheduled local government elections in May 2019 (or earlier in the event of a General Election or a referendum).

The implementation of the new polling arrangements will require some changes to the electoral register. The new electoral register will be published on 1 February 2019, following a statutory 14 day notice period.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The electoral review and the Blackburn with Darwen (Electoral Changes) Order 2017 (approved in December 2017) reduced the number of electoral wards from 23 to 17, with new wards boundaries. In order to re-align the polling districts and polling places with the new scheme the Council conducted a review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations between September and December 2018, in accordance with relevant legislation. The Council must seek to ensure that all electors in the borough and constituency have reasonable facilities for voting as are practicable in the circumstances.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Temporary polling stations (mobiles) are costly to hire. Under the current polling arrangements there are 6 such temporary polling stations. Following the review and under the final recommendations this will be reduced to one, resulting in savings to the elections budget.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983), every local authority has the statutory responsibility to divide their area into polling districts, to designate polling places for those polling districts, and to keep the polling districts and polling places under review.

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 introduced an additional requirement whereby local authorities must review all polling districts and polling places within the period of 16 months starting on 1 October of every fifth year after 1 October 2013. When undertaking a review steps set out in Schedule A1 to the Representation of the People Act 1983 must be followed.

Local authorities must also comply with specific access requirements, and in particular they must seek to ensure that all electors in a constituency in the local authority area have such

reasonable facilities for voting as practicable in the circumstances, and that so far as is reasonable and practicable every polling place is accessible to electors who are disabled.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The implementation of the review will involve significant work to update the GIS database, the electoral register and the elections management system. Some support from the software system provider may there be required by the Elections Team.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Council has a statutory obligation to ensure that polling places are accessible to all electors. The accessibility of buildings and location of polling places will be a key factor in developing the final proposals.

10. CONSULTATIONS

A Member Feedback Session was held on 17 September and invited feedback from Members of the initial draft proposals and suggestions for any suitable alternative polling places where appropriate. Notice of the review was published and the consultation on the Returning Officer's proposals took place between 1 October and 9 November 2018. Members were invited to continue providing comments and suggestions. The two Members of Parliament, the Returning Officer for the Rossendale & Darwen constituency and local disability groups were also notified of the review and invited to make representations on the proposals.

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Background Papers: None